

## The Banquet marks 25 years of meals

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**Publication info:** Argus Leader [Sioux Falls, S.D] 14 June 2010.

[ProQuest document link](#)

**Abstract:** Many have sat around The Banquet's tables since volunteers served the first meal June 17, 1985. [...] organizers say The Banquet has filled a vital niche in Sioux Falls.

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**Full text:** Ray Feller first went to The Banquet 10 years ago to try it out. Feller, 55, found his evening meals at home lonesome and wanted camaraderie.

At the time, he didn't think he needed The Banquet. Now Feller refers to the volunteers and people who attend The Banquet as family. He attends when his schedule as a custodian allows.

The Banquet fulfilled Feller's need for socialization. For others, The Banquet has met a basic need for food and a comfortable place to eat.

"Just about everyone who comes through the door has a need. Some need a free meal, some need a friend," Feller said.

Many have sat around The Banquet's tables since volunteers served the first meal June 17, 1985.

Since then, organizers say The Banquet has filled a vital niche in Sioux Falls. The nonprofit organization provides free meals six days a week.

Friendly hugs and handshakes were shared Sunday as members of the community celebrated The Banquet's 25th anniversary.

"The Banquet is intended to provide an opportunity for others to serve, and serve they do. It's a milestone, but it's also million of positive memories shared over those years," said Sioux Falls Mayor Mike Huether. He is the past president of The Banquet's board of directors.

Huether declared Thursday as The Banquet Day in Sioux Falls.

Volunteers and community members shared memories of how the organization and Sioux Falls has changed.

The Banquet now serves more meals. In 1985, volunteers served one meal per week. Now, The Banquet serves nine per week.

"I've seen more families, more numbers, people from different aspect of life," said volunteer Rita Baker. She has volunteered since 1993.

Perhaps the most visible change in 25 years is The Banquet's new location. The organization moved from 300 N. Main Ave. to its Eighth Street and Indian Avenue four years ago.

It's difficult to estimate how many people have dined at The Banquet. Last year, The Banquet served more than 148,000 meals, said executive director Tamera Jerke-Liesinger.

Community members expressed their thanks for meals that help make ends meet.

Joyce Nordquist, 48, of Sioux Falls occasionally eats dinner at The Banquet. "It's a great place, especially when you really need it," she said.

Many who have received give back.

When Mary West, 38, moved to Sioux Falls from Pierre two years ago, staff member at The Banquet helped her find other resources in Sioux Falls. Now, West tries to provide similar help.

"If I see people that need assistance, I talk to them," she said. "If I see someone who looks lost, I try to give back. I honestly feel like this is a very important place for people to come and enjoy their meal."

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